

## Despair and Hope--Chapter Nine

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All feedback appreciated!

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She had left the house rather early on this particular June morning in Wisconsin. She made her way quietly down the wooded trail, enjoying the soft, caressing breeze that welcomed her on this dusty early morning. Ahead, the faint sunlight of the morning trickled through the clouds, casting soft rays of light through the dewed leaves that swayed lazily in the trees.

Rose took this all in, still amazed by the pure beauty of nature. As a first class girl, she had been told that she had it all. But those people--like her mother--could never understand this kind of beauty in its purest form; this kind of freedom.

She pitied them. But if it had not been for Jack, she would still be one of them. And there it was. It always went back to Jack.

Rose stopped, suddenly, as the breeze that had once been gentle now gusted down the trail, whipping loose strands of hair about her face. The trees were now swaying in the wind, the occasional leaf tearing loose from the limb. She shivered suddenly, wrapping her arms around her chilled arms as the morning sun retreated beneath a cloud. Something was not right. There was something dark and brooding she could just sense on the edge of her mind. It was almost as if something were warning her of something--warning her of danger.

Dismissing her thought as foolishness, she continued on her way towards the school and her meeting with the principal.

She never heard the faint voice in the back of her mind; the voice who called out to her, begging her to go back the way she had come.  
"Rose . . . "

And this voice--the voice of her beloved Jack--was filled with terror  
. . .

\* \* \*

Rose took a deep breath as she stood in front of the entrance of the school. She smoothed back a red curl that had loosened from the practical bun she wore. The dress she had decided to wear for this particular occasion was just as practical, yet conservatively attractive. Lilly had chosen it. Rose was unsure of how to choose "simple" yet "attractive" clothing.

When shopping with her mother or socialite "friends," she had always been allowed to choose the most expensive and beautiful clothing of the latest fashions. There had been virtually no end to what she was allowed to purchase.

But things were different now. She was no longer a first class woman. Therefore, she had to learn to be thrift. Until then, Lilly would help her.

Pulling open the heavy doors, Rose stepped quietly into the corridor. She looked around, bright eyes alert and observing. All was quiet except for the distant sound of school children that echoed down the hall. It seemed normal enough.

Still, though, something was troubling her. Something was out of place; something that made her heart thud with dread.

"This is ridiculous, Rose," she muttered to herself. "It's just job interview jitters." Without further hesitation, she began her march in the direction of the office, head held high with the air of confidence she had been raised with. "To making it count," she whispered with a small smile, leaving her uneasiness behind her.

The wooden door was plain--painted in a simple dull bluish-gray with the simple words "Mr. Rodgers" stenciled in black. She knocked assuredly, reciting her credentials to herself. When the door opened, she was, in fact, so preoccupied that she almost did not see the figure sitting in the chair in front of the desk, back facing her direction.

"Mrs. Dawson," Mr. Rodgers greeted her, gesturing for her to enter the small office. "Mrs. Dawson, a strange situation has arisen, and I'm afraid I cannot hire you."

Rose opened her mouth to reply as she stared at Mr. Rodgers, uncomprehending. She glanced at the figure in the chair uneasily. His back was still turned to her, but Rose could see that he was tall and rather strongly built, with dark hair, and he was wealthy, judging by the highly fashionable suit he wore.

She tore her attention away from the man to look at Mr. Rodgers. "But you haven't even interviewed me yet. I assure you that I am highly qualified---"

"He has no doubt about your level of education or the validity of your credentials, Rose. What he questions is your honesty and your judgment."

Her back stiffened. No. That voice. It wasn't possible. Her eyes locked on sharply to the man in the chair. She studied his form hard, head already swimming.

Caledon Hockley rose to his full height, turning to face them. His dark eyes burned into hers with an odd combination of bitter anger and relief. Rose could do nothing but stare in return, trembling lips parted in shock. Time suddenly seemed to stop as she stared at him, unbelieving.

Mr. Rodgers was speaking again. "You see, this gentleman here claims that you are his fiancée. Therefore, you could not have been Mr. Dawson's wife."

"Of course she wasn't Dawson's wife," Hockley snapped, his eyes never leaving Rose's.

More words were spoken, but they were lost on her. All she could see were her hopes and dreams vanishing with the pounding of her heart. Everything that Jack had died for became more meaningless by the second.

And somewhere in the recesses of her heart, she thought she could hear Jack weeping.

\*I'll never let go. I promise.\*

She saw Jack's frozen body slide into the ocean. But this time, it was different. This time, before the water claimed him completely, his eyes snapped open. His dead eyes burned into her frozen heart, accusing her of things she had no control over. "Rose, you promised," he seemed to be saying. Through the window of the icy water, she saw his eyes glaze over with tears.

No, stop it. This isn't real. She opened her eyes, but the room seemed to be spinning. In a blur of light and colors, she could see the room where Cal and Mr. Rodgers stood staring at her, waiting for her to answer some question. But what that question was, Rose had no idea.

All this was beyond comprehension. She was going to faint.

"Rose, I'm taking you home." This was Cal's voice--mock gentle, mock caring. The threatening undertone in Cal's voice was not lost on Rose. She had heard that voice before.

The firm grip of someone's hand latched on roughly to her arm, hurting her; bruising her. She was practically dragged from the office, unable to respond; unable to cry out. It was all happening too fast.

Dimly, she was aware that Mr. Rodgers did nothing to help her. He had condemned her--thinking her to be a sick child whom knew not what was best for herself.

She was dragged into the hallway, the sounds of children's' distant laughter almost surreal in her ears. They were laughing at her--mocking her.

Cal was gripping her shoulders now; shaking her. "What were you thinking?? How could you do this to your mother? How could you do this to me?! Can you possibly imagine how worried we've been?!"

She felt a sharp pain sting her face. It was sudden and hard, bruising her delicate features. She stumbled back, recoiled in terror. Cal was yelling at her again, but his words were now a mingled blur in her ringing ears. As Cal grabbed her arm and dragged her down the corridor, she looked up in time to see a child round the corner. The little girl stopped, round face gazing up at her in pity; her bright blue eyes questioning.

The child with the curly blonde hair seemed so sad as she gazed at Rose. "Mommy?" she seemed to be crying, tears brimming her wide eyes.

"Jacklynn!" Rose screamed, tearing herself away from Cal's grip. Just as suddenly as she had fought loose of his grip, he was on her again, hands squeezing her arms hard enough to bruise. "No!" Rose screamed, fighting Cal's grip.

"I command you to do as I say!" Cal was screaming at her, demanding her to obey him.

He was too strong.

He managed to drag her out the door where a car was waiting to leave for the train station.

"Jack, I've failed you," Rose whispered, a lonely tear sliding down her reddened cheek as she was taken away from this life she had only so recently discovered, and her new home and family. Once again, against her will, she was Rose DeWitt Bukater, the slave.

\* \* \*

Silently, John Dawson had watched the entire ordeal from afar. He watched as the rich man dragged Rose screaming and crying from the school building and into the waiting car.

And John had waited for the satisfaction to seep in.

It never did. He had sent an innocent girl to burn at the stake out of pure pettiness.

"What have I done?" he whispered, head lowered in shame.

Continued in CHapter 10!

End  
file.